

Evaluation of Extra - Support for Families' Programme, Processes and Outcomes



'I think about things more - use things with the kids now as well. If they are winding you up rather than overreacting, I now think breathe, you calm down you feel different and you act different. I find that really, really helpful because it breaks it down, it makes it smaller and easier to handle and to cope with'

Parent comment from Building Confidence course, Summer 2019

Joy Magna MRes
Independent Evaluator
September 2019

Contents

1. Executive summary	page 3
2. Introduction and methodology	page 7
3. Delivering the programme	page 9
4. Need, demand and supply – waiting lists	page 11
5. Short and long courses	page 17
6. Drop-in support groups	page 36
7. Parenting platform	page 47
8. Appendix 1	page 49
9. Appendix 2	page 50

1. Executive summary

Extra – Support for Families (Extra) is a small Charitable Incorporated Organisation based in Jaywick in Tendring, North East Essex. Jaywick is the most deprived area in England and seven out of 90 of Tendring's LSOAs (Lower Layer Super Output Areas) are amongst the most deprived 10% in England. Extra delivers its services within this context, in the heart of the community, throughout Tendring. The aim of the evaluation is to establish the extent to which Extra is achieving its outcomes and make recommendations about the future development of the organisation.

The evaluation objectives are: to examine the different elements of Extra's support programme to assess the impact, to see if they make a long term-difference to parents and carers' lives; to measure whether the activities align with, and are successful in achieving, Extra's main goal and programme outcomes of: parents/carers feeling less isolated and have more social networks of support; parents/carers having improved mental health; parents/carers communicating better and having improved relationships with their children and parents/carers having increased confidence. The evaluation is based on Extra's programme of support from 2018-2019. The programme activity analysed in this evaluation is made up of short courses and long courses, workshops, parent peer support 'drop-in' groups and parenting platform multiagency meetings.

Summary of findings

- **Overall**

The evaluation report shows that Extra's support makes a positive difference to parents and carers' lives in line with the programme outcomes and that these have a long term positive impact. Extra is well placed to identify emerging needs and gaps in provision and has the flexibility to develop support to meet the needs of parents and carers in the area. Extra has strong working relationships with partner agencies which are integral to supporting families in Tendring.

- **Stakeholder feedback**

Stakeholder feedback from other agencies and groups in Tendring, about Extra, was very positive. Extra are valued as a well- established organisation that provides stability, particularly in a climate of short- term funding where projects and organisations come and go. They are perceived as delivering a high-quality flexible service and organisations are confident making referrals to them.

- **Extra's approach**

Extra's philosophy is to put parents and carers at the centre of all the support they offer. They recognise the importance of the first point of contact and aim to address people's concerns and circumstances from the outset.

Extra provides refreshments at all courses and drop-in group sessions to help people feel nurtured. All attempts are made to remove barriers which prevent participation, including transport and childcare, if necessary.

Extra uses a participatory style of learning as everyone has something or experience to contribute which enriches the group and the learning experience. The informal learning environment works well, sitting around a table, having food available and facilities to get up to make a drink. This approach appeals to participants because it is different to a traditional learning environment which has negative associations for some parents.

There are incidental benefits which arise out of the participatory and supportive environment that Extra provides through its courses and drop-in groups. The courses and groups provide opportunities for personal growth and development which can be scarce, particularly for parents and carers of children with additional needs. Some participants go on to become volunteers taking on an informal role in groups, and for others this can lead to further training to facilitate parent peer support groups become a co-facilitator of courses.

The 'golden thread' of the principles of participation extends to involving and developing parent and carer volunteers within the support offered.

- **Extra's courses**

Findings from the short courses show participants learnt techniques and strategies to help reduce stress and anxiety, improving their mental wellbeing. This demonstrates that some topics can be delivered and achieve positive outcomes within a relatively short time frame of five weeks. Waiting lists show there is a significant demand for these courses, particularly those that cover managing worries and anxieties.

The analysis of data and interviews with participants attending two of the long courses verified that the courses made a positive difference to people's lives. Participants reported substantial improvements in confidence and wellbeing as a result of attending the Building Confidence course. Data shows that in most aspects the positive benefits continued to increase a year after the course, evidencing that **the courses had a long-term positive impact.**

Extracts from interviews with Building Confidence course participants provide many concrete examples of how parents now feel good about themselves, have more confidence, feel they are coping better, and enjoy their children more. Comments from parents and carers on the SWAN

course showed continuing confidence in managing their children's behaviour whilst recognising the ongoing difficulties they face. There was evidence of techniques learnt on the courses still being used and new ones being tried as children grow and new behaviours emerge. Improved communication skills were evident in managing home and school relationships, improving the critical liaison required for children with additional needs.

- **Parent Peer Support Groups (drop-ins)**

Extra supports six very different drop-in support groups and they fulfil two main functions; they support and empower parents and carers by providing a social network of people that understand their situation, reducing feelings of social isolation, and they also help Extra broaden access to their services – reaching people that do not generally engage with support services. This makes the drop-ins very effective in supporting and changing people's lives for the better. Interviews with parents and carers at The Heroes drop-in support group revealed that there are **'hidden' positive outcomes for children'** arising out of the group. Many parents talked about the benefits of coming to the group in terms of their children's social development and learning to play, not just about the benefits for them as adult parent/carers.

Comments from parents and carers show peer support works well within the drop-in groups but facilitators play an essential role steering the group, providing stability with their constant presence and as a source of information. Having facilitators in the drop-in groups means that Extra has 'a finger on the pulse' placing them in a strong position to recognise and consult with service users about emerging issues. This enables Extra to provide a quick response by delivering appropriate new courses to meet needs as they arise.

There is a flourishing relationship between the drop-in groups and Extra courses. Drop-ins support parents and carers who have attended Extra courses and this helps to maintain the positive outcomes and impact from the courses. The drop-ins also attract new people looking for information and support and new group members then often go on to attend courses. Even for parents and carers who do not attend Extra's courses the drop-ins help to prevent social isolation, as it is a safe space where people can share their experiences and feelings and feel supported by the group.

- **Parenting Platform**

Extra takes a lead role in facilitating a forum for organisations providing services for parents and families in the Tendring District, to share information, develop services, identify gaps in provision, strengthen relationships and create partnerships. Extra' benefits from hosting the

Parenting Platform forum for partner organisations in Tendring as it positions them well to understand the ‘community of services’ available in the locality and this gives them a solid knowledge base from which to develop their own offer to parents/carers in a continuously changing landscape of need and provision.

Areas for development:

- **Waiting lists**

Waiting lists are used as an indicator of demand for the courses and workshops that Extra deliver to meet their core programme objectives. There are anomalies with this approach, but it was considered the best available signifier of demand. There is significant demand for some courses, in particular, the SWAN course which supports parents and carers to learn new skills and strategies to help manage their children’s additional needs. It is recommended that the waiting lists are refreshed so that a more accurate assessment of demand can be made to inform future programming of courses.

- **Communicating with family members**

It was identified that it is difficult for parents and carers who attend the SWAN course to communicate the principles and techniques to their partners/family/friends. This means that it can be problematic in getting agreement to implement new techniques and routines for children at home. There is scope for Extra to find a way to improve communication with the second parent or family members, so they are more aware of the techniques and process – this could be one-off session which forms part of the course.

- **Gender of course attendees**

Significantly more women than men attend courses and workshops. A closer analysis of the reasons why so few men do not attend would help to ensure that there are no implicit disadvantages preventing them from participating.

- **Attendance at multiple courses**

Interviews with participants confirmed that it is not uncommon for them to attend the same course more than once. They provided justifiable reasons why and the benefits they receive from doing this. However, for Extra to demonstrate equity of access to courses it is suggested that monitoring is set up to capture the number of people that attend the same course more than once and which courses this applies to. This will inform why this occurs and whether it has any impact on other people on the waiting list. Further analysis may indicate the need for other services such as mentoring or personal coaching as an alternative to repeating courses.

2. Introduction and methodology

Extra has been delivering services for parents and families across Tendring district since 2003 and is a well-established organisation with a significant track record working in this area. In 2015 it transferred its Governance from a Community Interest Company (CIC) to Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO).

This report provides an external evaluation of Extra's work, of the previous year, from 2018-2019. It gives an overview of the programme Extra has delivered within the Tendring area. It also includes a close examination of aspects of the programme; evaluating the impact and the difference they make to the lives of parents and carers who participate in these activities.

It includes an assessment of the courses delivered, the work of the drop-in support groups and Extra's strategic role in organising and hosting the Parenting Platform. It provides findings on the current work and suggestions for issues to explore further.

The report examines the demand for Extra's programme by looking at the waiting lists for courses and workshops. It analyses different elements of the programme in the context of how they relate to the achievement of Extra's overall aim and four main programme objectives.

The purpose of the evaluation is to establish the extent to which Extra is achieving its outcomes and make recommendations about the future development of the organisation.

Methodology

The report is based on a mixed methodology which gathers and uses data from a range of sources. By using more than one approach the strengths of one method can be used to overcome the weaknesses of another. So, in this study the scored outcome measures that participants complete before and after attending a course are analysed and are used to inform and develop the questions asked in parent focus groups and semi-structured interviews. The results from different methods can validate each other and provide stronger evidence for reaching conclusions.

The methodology combines both quantitative and qualitative data:

- ✓ participant pre and post feedback forms (taken from Lamplight¹)
- ✓ demand and supply data

¹ Extra uses 'Lamplight' a monitoring and evaluation database designed for charities to measure outcomes and impact

Extra – Support for Families External Evaluation 2019

- ✓ focus groups with current and previous course participants individual semi-structured interviews with participants;
- ✓ semi-structured interviews with course facilitators;
- ✓ semi-structured interviews with staff

The data for this report is drawn from parenting programmes delivered from April 2018 to July 2019, waiting lists from June 2018 to May 2019, drop-in support groups from June to July 2019 and Parenting Platform meeting of July 2019.

The overall aim for EXTRA sets the broad context of the work and is:

‘To advance education and promote good mental health and wellbeing among parents and carers in North East Essex by providing and assisting in the provision of programmes and workshops in parenting skills, family support and other related activities in order that their children may develop into emotionally and physically healthy adults.’

Both Extra’s overall aim and its four programme outcomes have been used as the framework for the evaluation:

The programme objectives are:

- a) Parents/carers will feel less isolated and have more social networks for support
- b) Parent/carers will have improved mental health
- c) Parents/carers will communicate better and have improved relationships with their children
- d) Parents/carers will have increased confidence

The conclusions reached and observations made in this report are based on the extent to which the programme outcomes meet the stated aim and objectives.

3. Delivering the Programme

Extra's philosophy is to put parents and carers at the centre of all the support they offer. They recognise the importance of the first point of contact and aim to address people's concerns and circumstances from the outset. Where appropriate, parents and carers are encouraged and supported to make the next step, whether it is to come to a drop-in support group session or attend a course or workshop. Extra also provides an informal information and signposting service to other agencies and groups in the area.

Extra provides refreshments at all courses and drop-in group sessions to help people feel nurtured and in recognition that many parents and carers arrive without having had anything to eat or drink. These things make parents feel valued and are fundamental to attracting and keeping parents on courses. All attempts are made to remove barriers which prevent participation, including transport and childcare, if necessary.

Extra uses a participatory training approach viewing training as a learning process - learning new skills, concepts and behaviour. By 'supporting from behind' instead of 'leading from the front' they facilitate a process where parents and carers are encouraged to explore and discover for themselves. Through this method they look at attitudes and self-belief; confronting set ideas and set patterns of behaviour; and help people to rethink and learn new skills and techniques. Knowledge and skills gained this way are more easily internalised and put-into-practice and are more likely to endure beyond the life of the training course.

They employ a core staff of 4 people and 3 skilled independent facilitators. The organisation has a strong commitment to continuing professional development and offers clinical and developmental supervision to all their facilitators. There are developmental workshops for facilitators to enable them to share successes and challenges and improve their practice in running parenting programmes.

The 'golden thread' of the principles of participation extends to involving and developing parent and carer volunteers. Parent volunteers take on a range of peer support roles such as supporting other parents at drop-in groups; some go on to become accredited facilitators which enables them to work alongside the Programme Officer, and other facilitators, to deliver courses.

Extra also works in partnership with other agencies to identify need, develop new courses and workshops and deliver parenting programmes. During the last year they have delivered courses in partnership with 16 partners, as follows: Ravens Academy, Home Start Harwich, Broomgrove Juniors School, Walton Community Centre, Tendring Technology College, White Hall Academy, InterAct, Coastal Community Centre, Harwich Library, Sir Martin Frobisher Academy, Colchester and Tendring

Baby Sensory, Next Chapter, Teen Talk Harwich, Chase Lane Primary School, Holland Haven Primary School and Essex County Council's Specialist Teaching and Preschool Service.

The manager and programme officer attend networking events and joint planning meetings in different parts of the district to share information. Extra also hosts and organises the Parenting Platform which is a multi-agency quarterly meeting that is attended by Statutory and Voluntary sector groups.

EXTRA maintains its office base and main group and training room at the Jaywick Community Resource Centre. Whilst it is not central in the Tendring District it is felt that it is important to be based in the most deprived part of the area so that its services are most accessible to the people that live there. They also deliver programmes in a range of community centres and schools across the district including Walton, Clacton-on-Sea and Harwich.

4. Need, demand and supply – waiting lists

Extra works in areas of high deprivation in the Tendring district and their services respond to the high level of need. Seven areas of Tendring are amongst the most deprived 10% in England and Jaywick is the most deprived area in the whole of England. Inequalities that develop in childhood tend to disadvantage people as they become adults however, early support can help to mitigate these problems later in life.

Tendring has multiple areas of significant child poverty when compared to the rest of the county, with almost a quarter of all children living in low-income families. Tendring has a disproportionately high percentage of families receiving support from Family Solutions, an early intervention family project. The rate of domestic abuse offences is above the county average. It also has the highest levels of children in care in Essex, with many placed from outside the area.

Tendring has a significantly higher rate of under 18s teenage conceptions than the Essex and national averages. Research evidence suggests that teenage mothers are less likely to finish their education, are more likely to bring up their child alone and in poverty and have a higher risk of poor mental health than older mothers.

A higher proportion of working age adults in Tendring have no qualifications when compared to the national and Essex averages. Average weekly earnings are low, lower than earnings for the whole of Essex and national figures.²

All these factors contribute to the need and demand for the services and this is the context in which Extra offers support for families.

Waiting lists

Waiting lists, for Extra courses and workshops for the past year, from July 2018-June 2019, have been used as a broad indicator for demand for courses, although it does have limitations. Some people will have been offered a place but have been unable to take it up due to personal circumstances. Talking to parents and carers at the Drop-ins there are a variety of reasons why they cannot take up a place including; stress in the home, difficulties with children, domestic abuse, lack of confidence and readiness to participate. Nevertheless, they still ask to remain on the waiting list showing that they want to attend the course when the time is right for them.

² All this information has been taken from Essex Insights, A profile of people living in Tendring, April 2016

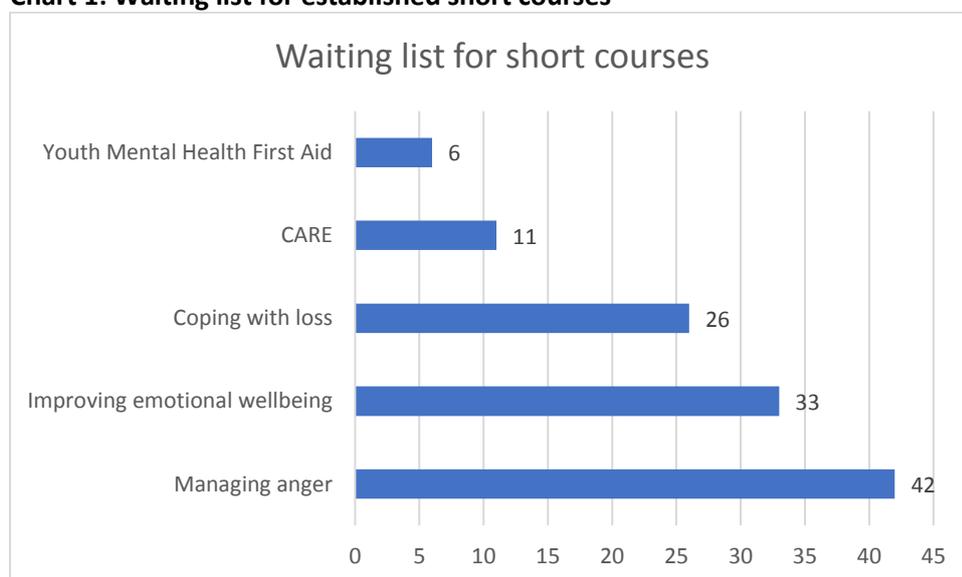
The waiting lists have been divided into three sections: short courses, longer courses, and workshops.

Short courses

There are two charts below which illustrate the demand for short courses. The information has been divided into two charts because one set of short courses are established courses which cut across a range of topics and the other chart represents a new 'suite' of five courses which focuses on mental health and wellbeing.

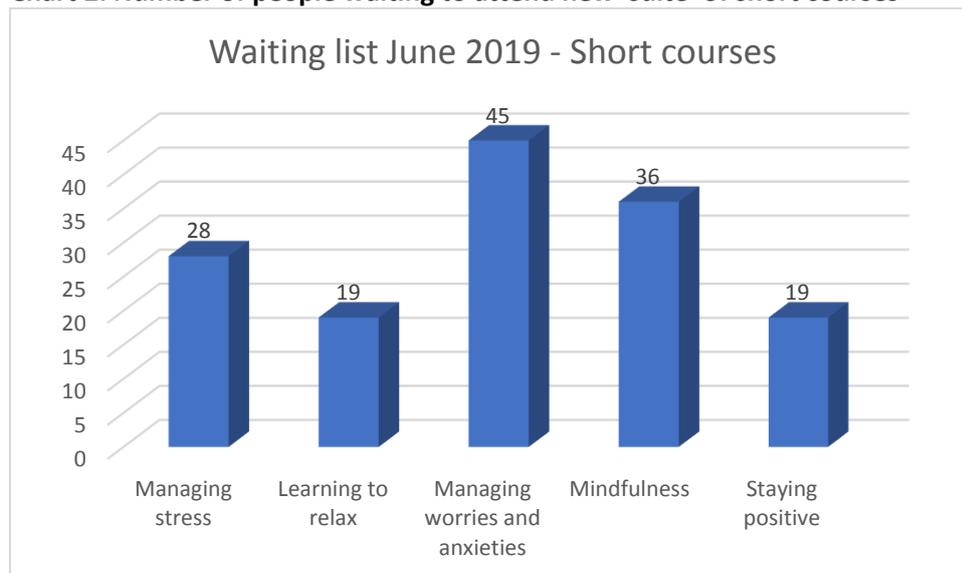
Firstly, looking at the established short courses, in the chart below, we can see that the greatest demand, at the time of this evaluation, is for Managing Anger, with some 42 people showing an interest in attending this course.

Chart 1: Waiting list for established short courses



Secondly, the chart below shows the demand for a new series of short five-week courses focused on mental wellbeing including; Learning to Relax, Managing Stress, Managing Worries and Anxieties, Mindfulness, and Staying Positive.

Chart 2: Number of people waiting to attend new 'suite' of short courses



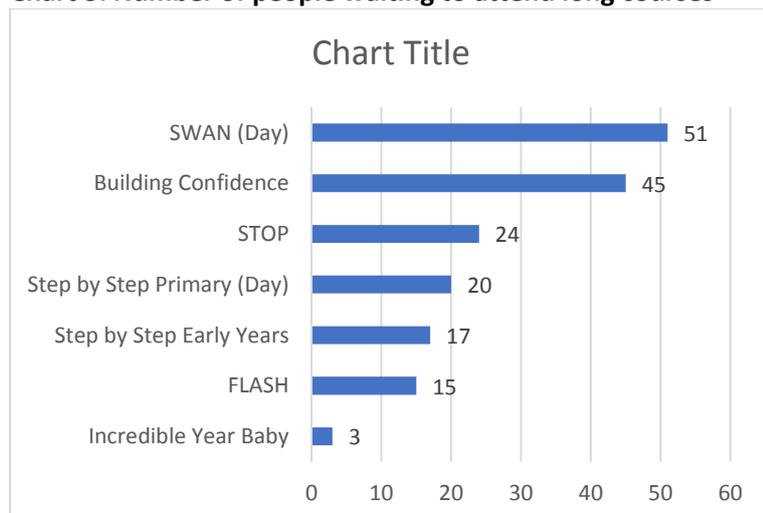
These courses were funded by Colchester Catalyst Charity

The chart shows that there is a significant number of people waiting to attend these courses with some 45 people wanting to attend the Managing Worries and Anxieties course. This signifies a sizable demand for courses addressing emotional and wellbeing issues.

Longer courses

The longer courses cover courses on positive behaviour management for parents and carers and a course on building confidence. The courses range from nine to eleven weeks, one session per week.

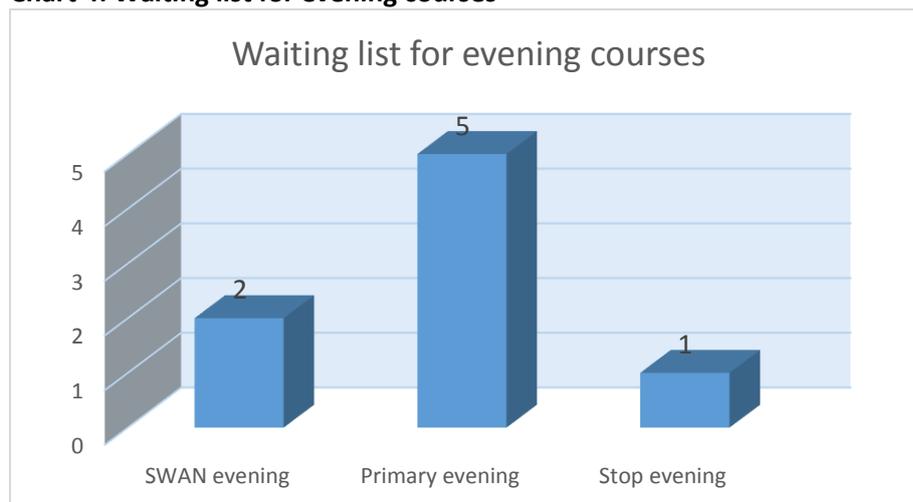
Chart 3: Number of people waiting to attend long courses



The chart shows that there is high demand across the range of courses with the most people, 51, waiting to attend the SWAN course (Support With Additional Needs) The next course with the most people waiting is Building Confidence, some 45 people.

Fewer people request evening courses, so there are not many people on the waiting lists for evening courses, as the chart below shows. This means with little apparent demand Extra do not presently run evening courses.

Chart 4: Waiting list for evening courses



Waiting lists are only held for three evening courses; SWAN, Primary and Stop. The most demand is five, for the Primary course.

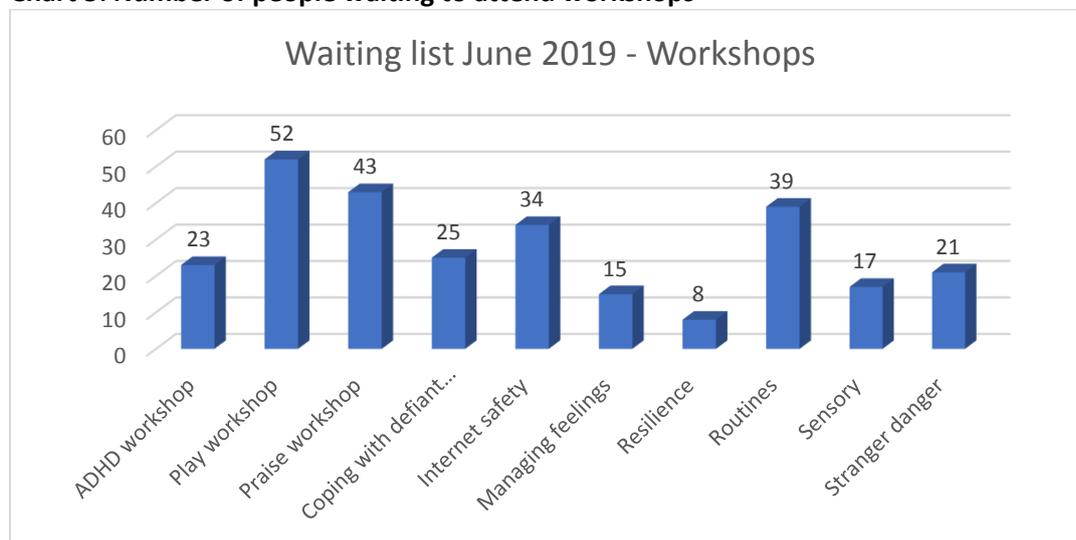
People wanting to attend the evening courses are generally working in the day and cannot attend the day-time courses. Talking to staff it seems people are reluctant to travel in the evening to attend a course in another part of the district, so with such low numbers it is not viable to run courses in the evening. Also, a further barrier to attending evening courses for lone parents is that Extra cannot provide a crèche in the evening. However, Focus Groups have mentioned that there is a need for evening and weekend courses/workshops.

Anecdotally it appears that only approximately 10% of attendees at the courses and drop-ins are male. It is not fully understood whether this is because it is men that are predominately working during the day, or if there is a high proportion of female-only heads of household (primary carers of children) or if the current day courses do not attract men. Further analysis of the need for barriers to attending evening courses may help to understand the gender imbalance in attending courses.

Workshops

The waiting list for workshops includes ten workshops across a range of topics.

Chart 5: Number of people waiting to attend workshops



The chart demonstrates that there is a high demand for workshops which offer information and parenting skills. For example, there are 52 people wanting to attend a Play workshop, 43, a Praise workshop and 39 a Routines workshop.

Two workshops were held in the Summer Term of 2019; Resilience in May and ADHD in June, both were for two hours in the morning. Recent feedback on the ADHD workshop suggested that the session was only enough time for information and insufficient time to explore strategies to manage behaviour.

Workshops offer the potential to reach more people but there are disadvantages to working with people using this method. It can pose difficulties for facilitators as they want to deliver all the content but at the same time do not want to devalue parents by not listening to their experiences. Facilitators suggest it is difficult to help parents if you don't understand their situation and know something about them.

'On the course you get to know a bit about their children's likes and dislikes – what has worked in the past for them so you can adapt it more for them. With a workshop you don't get the chance to build that relationship with a parent'.

A further point relating to supply and demand came up in interviews with course participants and parents and carers attending the drop-ins. It became clear that several course participants have attended the same course more than once or several courses with related topics. Extra are aware of

this occurrence and it was discussed as part of the briefing stage of the evaluation. It is raised here because of its potential impact on waiting lists but is discussed more fully in the section on long courses.

Findings

1. The waiting lists establish the demand for the courses and workshops that Extra deliver that meet their core programme objectives.
2. The waiting list suggests that there is a greater need for courses and workshops than Extra can fulfil.
3. The demand for the new 'five wellbeing' short courses demonstrates that parents and carers need support and new skills to help them cope with anxiety and stress.
4. There is a huge demand from parents with children with additional needs waiting to attend a SWAN course which will provide them with information and support to learn new skills and strategies to help manage their children's additional needs.
5. The demand for workshops cuts across topics: positive behaviour management, safety, special needs and building resilience. Currently the highest demand is for workshops that cover parenting skills.
6. Workshops are useful for providing information and signposting. They have limitations dealing with more complex issues of behaviour management, mental health and wellbeing.
7. Significantly more women than men attend courses and workshops. A closer analysis of the reasons why men do not attend would help to ensure that there are no implicit disadvantages preventing them. It will also help to understand whether there is a greater demand for evening courses than the current waiting lists show.

5. Short and long courses

This section examines both the short and long courses that Extra delivers, ranging from five weeks to eleven weeks. It is beyond the scope of this evaluation to look at all the courses, so a cross section of courses has been selected to study in-depth to establish to what extent Extra are achieving their programme outcomes and to make recommendations for future programme development.

Short courses

As seen in the supply and demand section Extra provides a range of short courses, some well-established, and a new 'suite' which focuses on mental health and wellbeing. It was decided to focus on the new 'suite' of short courses to investigate both how the need for these courses arose and whether they met the proposed outcomes.

Within the context of developing new courses Extra takes account of national trends as well as issues highlighted by partner organisations at the Parenting Platform forum, and by parents attending other Extra courses and support groups.

As part of the project development stage of the new 'suite' of courses Extra carried out a parent and carer survey, in 2018, to research and analyse the perceived need for courses addressing anxiety and stress. Some 39 people responded;

- 84% of people said they would like to attend a short course on 'Coping with stress and managing anxiety'
- 82% of people said they would like to attend a short course on 'Learning to relax and stay positive'
- 76% of people said they would like to attend a short course on 'Mindfulness for reducing stress and anxiety'

As a result, in the autumn term 2018 (September – December 2018) Extra delivered five courses for parents and carers funded by Colchester Catalyst. The courses were: Managing Worries/Anxiety, Managing Stress, Learning to Relax, Staying Positive and Mindfulness - for reducing stress and anxiety. The aim of the courses was to reduce levels of stress and anxiety in parents/carers, thus improving their mental health and wellbeing and indirectly that of their children.

70 parents/carers attended the courses with 50 completing beginning and end of course questionnaires.

A detailed report of progress made towards the three main project outcomes was produced by Extra, in January 2019, for Colchester Catalyst. Below is a short summary of outcome progress:

Outcome 1: Parents/carers will have improved mental health

- 84% parent/carers reported feeling better about themselves at the end of the courses
- **Managing Worries/Anxiety (15 parents*)**
- 87% parents/carers felt more able to define the sources of their worries/anxiety
- 87% parent/carers felt more able to control their worries
- 93% parents/carers felt more able to use methods to manage worries and anxiety
- **Managing Stress (12 parents*)**
- 100% parents/carers scored more highly on having strategies to enable them to cope with stress
- 83% parents/carers scored more highly on understanding how to use 'positive self-talk' to help them to manage stress and anxiety
- **Learning to Relax (8 parents/carers*)**
- 100% parents/carers reported more highly on knowing ways to relax
- 86% parents/cares reported being more able to use calming 'self-talk' to avoid tension build up
- **Staying positive (8 parents/carers*)**
- 100% parents/carers felt more able to identify and focus on positives
- 100% parents/carers felt more able to focus on their strengths
- 100% parents/carers felt more able to change negative 'self-talk' into positive 'self-talk'
- 88% parents/carers scored more highly on knowing how to strengthen their resilience
- **Mindfulness (7 parents/carers*)**
- 71% parents/carers reported being more aware of the physical and emotion impacts of stress and anxiety
- 86% parents/carers scored more highly on having the techniques to help them manage stress and anxiety
- 100% parents/carers scored more highly on knowing how to help their families cope with stress and anxiety

Outcome 2: Parents/carers will feel less isolated and will have more social networks for support

- 63% parents/carers reported knowing other people in the same situation as themselves
- 96% parents/carers reported having made new friends with 86% parents/carers reporting they planned to meet up with the new friends after the courses finished

Outcome 3: Parents/carers will have increased confidence

- 67% parents/carers reported feeling able to offer support to others
- 72% parents/carers reported being able to ask for help if they needed it

The outcome scores participants gave themselves when the course finished showed that 100% of parents and carers improved their scoring in the following areas:

- ✓ 100% parents/carers scored more highly on having strategies to enable them to cope with stress
- ✓ 100% parents/carers reported more highly on knowing ways to relax
- ✓ 100% parents/carers felt more able to identify and focus on positives
- ✓ 100% parents/carers felt more able to focus on their strengths
- ✓ 100% parents/carers felt more able to change negative 'self-talk' into positive 'self-talk'
- ✓ 100% parents/carers scored more highly on knowing how to help their families cope with stress and anxiety

Findings for short courses

1. The development of the five short courses to address anxiety and stress demonstrate that Extra is well placed to identify emerging needs and gaps in provision. They have the mechanisms to consult with parents and carers to test out assumptions about the need for new courses and how they would best be delivered. It also shows that the organisation can provide a quick response to emerging needs which successfully delivers programme specific outcomes.
2. The delivery of the courses in five weeks demonstrates that some topics can be successfully delivered in a relatively short time frame and make a big impact in reducing stress and anxiety to improve mental wellbeing.
3. The waiting lists show there is a demand for these short courses, particularly those that cover managing worries and anxieties.

Long courses

This section examines Extra's long courses and seeks to evaluate the impact they have on parents and carers that attend them and whether these outcomes are aligned to the programme's intended outcomes. It focuses particularly on evidencing the impact on participants on completion of the course and whether this is maintained a year later and can be described as a long-term impact. Extra delivers a wide selection of long courses for parents and carers and their termly programme changes to meet existing and emerging needs. This section focuses on two long courses which address different needs; Building Confidence and SWAN (supporting children with additional needs). This allows for a more in-depth analysis using both qualitative and quantitative methods. With this aim several methods and sources of information have been used to analyse and evaluate the two long courses:

- ✓ participant pre and post feedback forms (taken from Lamplight);
- ✓ focus groups with current and previous course participants;

- ✓ individual semi-structured interviews with participants;
- ✓ semi-structured interviews with course facilitators;
- ✓ semi-structured interviews with staff

The first long course to be discussed is the Building Confidence course, of nine weeks, which helps parents to recognise how confidence affects what we do. It includes how to use techniques that build confidence and self-esteem through challenging negative thoughts and negative views of self and how to create an individual action plan to build confidence. Some 21 people attended this course and 16 completed before and after questionnaires.

The second is the SWAN course, of eleven weeks, that supports parents of children who have additional needs. Within the course parent's individual challenges are recognised and worked with to introduce positive parenting skills. Some 22 people attended this course.

Both courses work specifically with parents but as the evidence shows they have a wider impact on how participants interact with their children, families and wider social networks.

Building Confidence course

At the start of the course participants are asked to score themselves out of ten against a range of statements to provide baseline data of how they perceive themselves. The statements fall into two broad categories; one relating to how they feel about themselves and two about what they think about their parenting skills and relationships with their children.

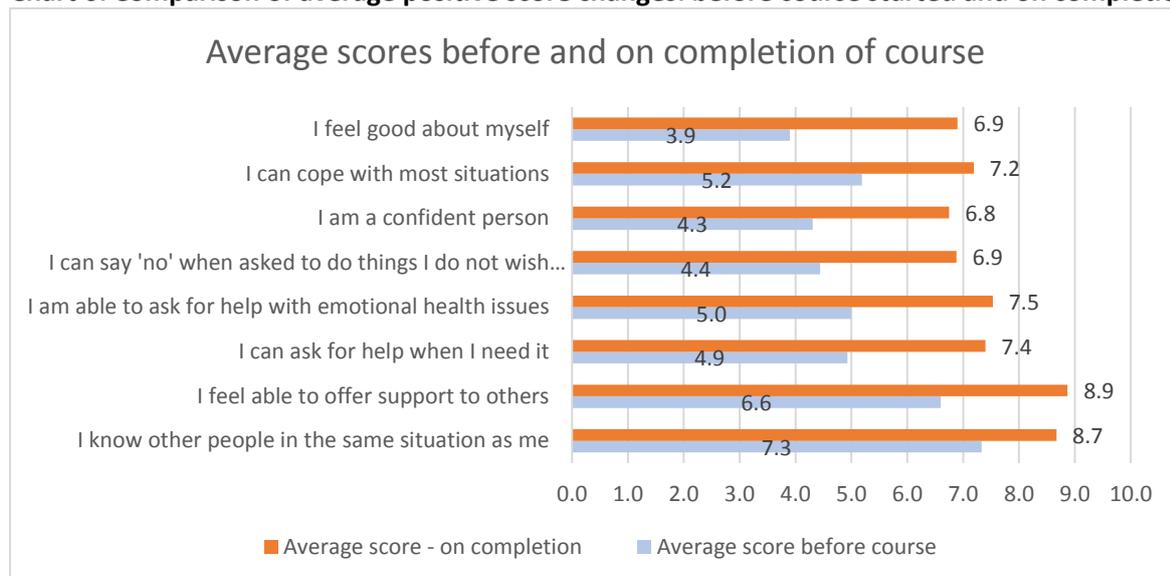
At the end of the course participants scored themselves again against the same statements. This information is analysed in the following section to assess whether there was a positive or negative change as a result of attending the course.

Firstly, examining the category of statements about how people feel about themselves. Before the course began participants gave themselves very low scores, averaging less than five out of ten:

- I feel good about myself – 3.3
- I am a confident person – 4.3
- I can say 'no' when asked to do things I don't want to do – 4.4
- I can ask for help when I need it – 4.9

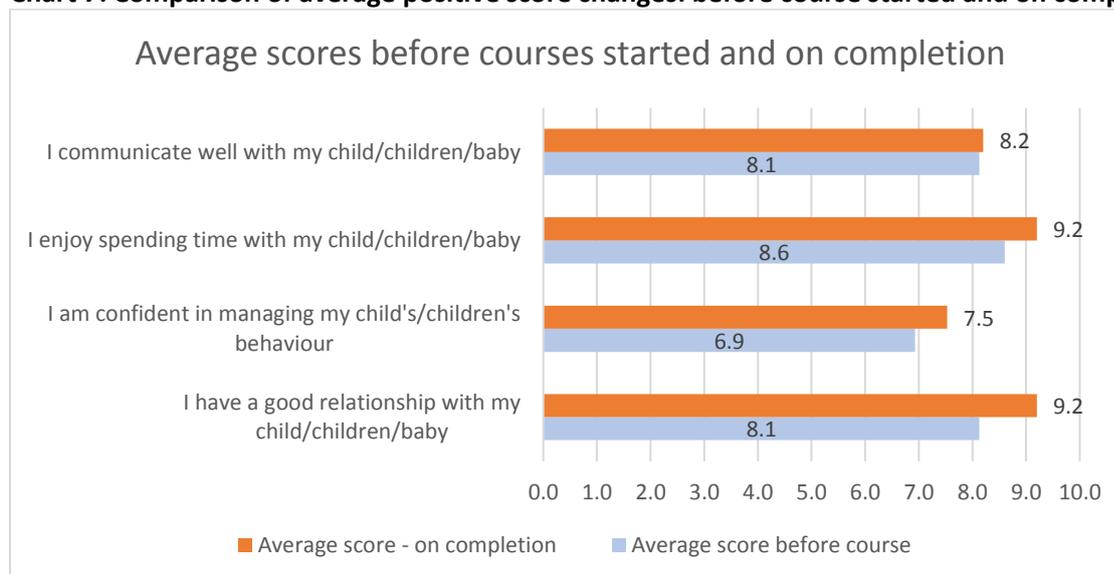
The chart below shows the positive increase in scoring in all the statements which relate to how people feel about themselves on completion of the course. The chart indicates that participants gained the most benefit in areas where they scored lowest before the course started. This suggests that the course had a notable impact on improving levels of confidence and self-esteem.

Chart 6: Comparison of average positive score changes: before course started and on completion



The second category about how participants thought they related to their children is shown in the chart below. These show a smaller increase in scoring, suggesting that at the end of the course the benefits were weighted more towards personal benefits rather than changes to perceptions of relationships with their children. However, the initial scores, before the start of the course, were higher in this category typically between seven and eight.

Chart 7: Comparison of average positive score changes: before course started and on completion



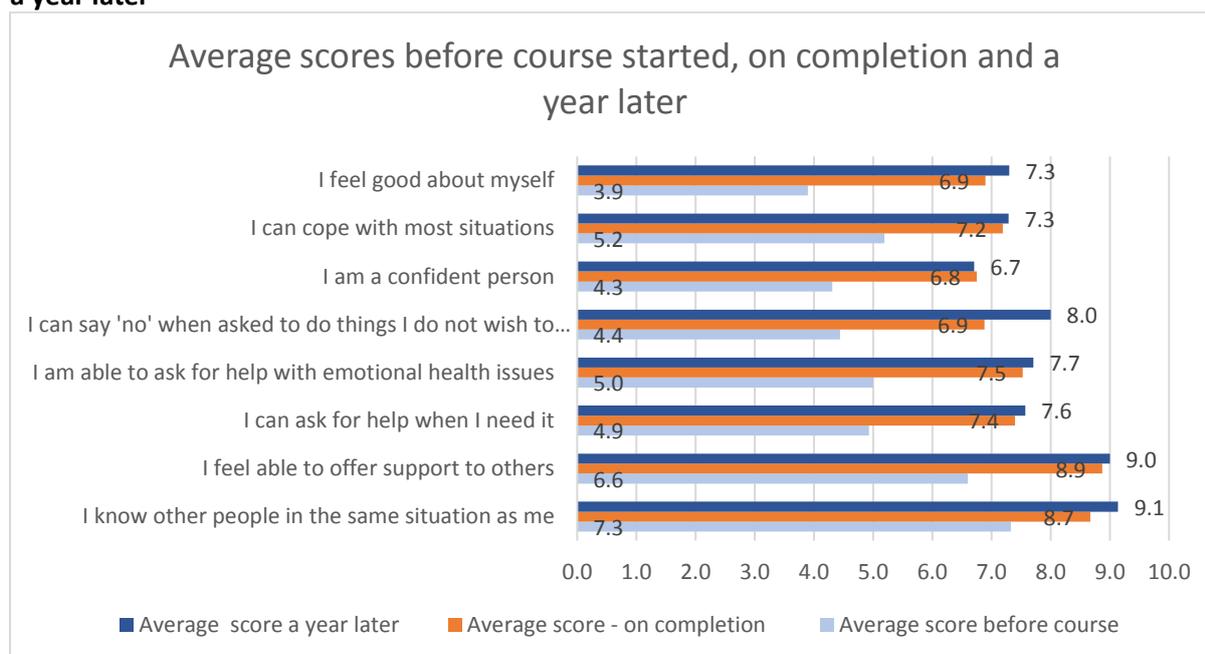
So, from the above charts we can see that parents and carers experienced positive changes from attending the Building Confidence course. These outcomes align with the four programme

objectives: parents and carers will have improved mental health; will have improved confidence and will feel less isolated and have more social networks for support and will communicate better and have improved relationships with their children.

Follow-up course evaluation

In Summer 2019, participants were contacted and asked to score the same set of questions again to assess what impact the course had in the longer-term on confidence and relationships with their children. The data in the charts below demonstrates that the improvements in confidence and wellbeing that participants accrued during the course were maintained in the following year. Furthermore, in most categories the positive benefits were not only maintained but continued to increase for the statements used to measure positive change⁴.

Chart 8: Comparison of average positive score changes: before course started, on completion and a year later



Looking at data in the first category, relating to how participants feel about themselves the chart above shows:

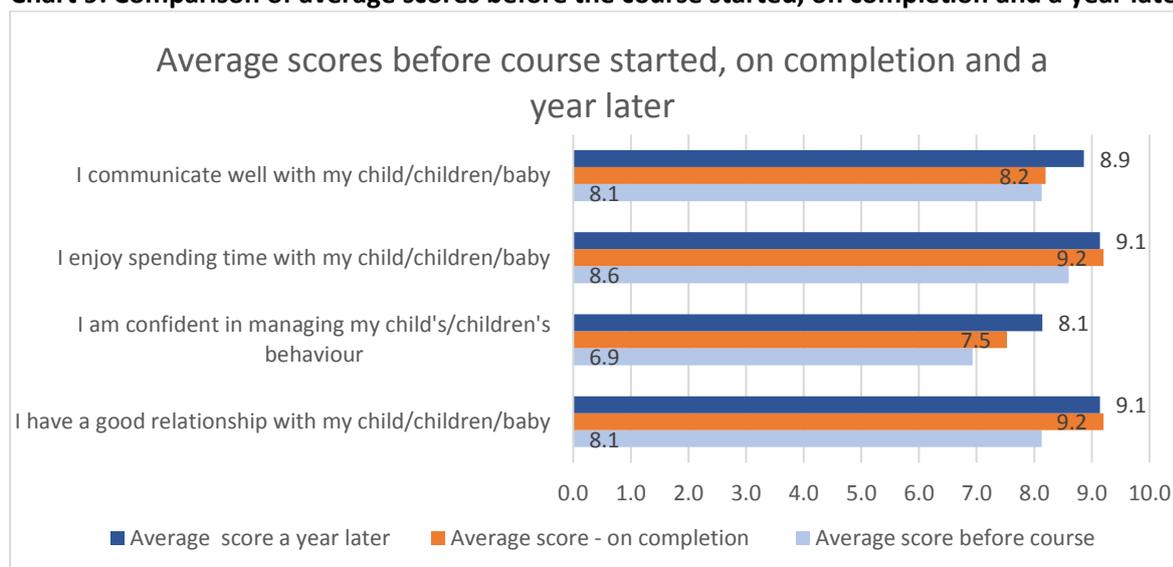
- ✓ at the beginning of the course the average score for ‘I feel good about myself’ was very low at 3.9 and this increased to 6.9 at the end of the course and continued to improve a year later at 7.3.
- ✓ at the beginning of the course the average score for ‘I can cope with most situations’ was 5.2 and this increased to 7.2 at the end of the course and was maintained a year later at 7.3.

⁴ The only statement that showed a slight loss of positive change was ‘I know other people in the same situation as me’.

- ✓ at the beginning of the course the average score for ‘I am a confident person’ was very low at 4.3 and this increased to 6.8 at the end of the course and was maintained a year later at 6.7.
- ✓ at the beginning of the course the average score for ‘I can say ‘no’ when asked to do things I do not want to do’ was 4.4 and this increased to 6.9 at the end of the course and was further increased a year later at 8.
- ✓ at the beginning of the course the average score for ‘I am able to ask for help with emotional health issues’ was 5.0 and this increased to 7.5 at the end of the course and slightly increased a year later at 7.7.

The chart examines below the second category of data; what participants thought about their parenting skills and relationships with their children. It compares the average scores before the course started, on completion and at the follow-up a year later in 2019. In all areas scores are maintained and mostly there is a small increase in average scores, showing a positive improvement.

Chart 9: Comparison of average scores before the course started, on completion and a year later



The chart above shows:

- ✓ At the beginning of the course the average score for ‘I enjoy spending time with my child/children/baby’ was 8.6 and this increased to 9.2 at the end of the course and a year later was 9.1.
- ✓ At the beginning of the course the average score for ‘I am a confident in managing my child/children’s behaviour’ was 6.9 and this increased to 7.5 at the end of the course and continued to improve and a year later was 8.1.

Studying the scored outcome data provides a quantifiable interpretation of changes participants experienced before, on completion of the course and a year later. To better understand the quality of the experience a Focus group was carried out. However, due to the timing of the evaluation it was not possible to speak directly to the Building Confidence follow-up group in 2019 (participants of 2018) so instead a Focus group was held with parents and carers on completion of the Summer 2019 Building Confidence group.

The purpose of the Focus group was to ask the participants to explain in their own words what impact the course has had on them and the way they relate to their children. Their responses have been aligned to the scoring 'outcome framework' to exemplify and illustrate positive change that has been represented in the earlier charts.

Looking first at the category of outcomes relating to how participants feel about themselves and their confidence levels. In relation to **'I feel good about myself'**.

Parents said:

- *'(I am) more talkative – willing to speak out – I didn't talk much before, you don't if you're not in a good place'*
- *'I used to hate groups, but now, here, you learn off of everybody and what they suggest, and you take that home with you. I feel like I've achieved, I had something to say and I said it and we change together for the best'*

Looking at the statement **'I can cope with most situations'** some participants were able to explain how differently they were feeling before and after the course and what a positive change was for them.

Participants openly shared their experiences:

- *'I know what changes have happened with me..... I deal with things better. Everything I have to deal with now I am not uncertain about – when stuff comes along, I can get in there and get on with it. Because we are all going to have stuff come along and we can't shut away from it all the time – now you can deal with it and it has gone. I used to have a box with all the stuff that troubles you, but my box is nearly empty cos I get through things.'*
- *'I think It is the positive self-talk that helps – because no matter whatever you are going through you can always see a negative but by using positive self-talk it gets easier. I think OK you've had your moment, you've had your thought now go I'm only doing positives now. So even the negative things people say it's like go away I don't need that anymore I am going forward'.*

Nearly everybody contributed to the discussion about being part of a group and how valuable that felt, **'I know other people in the same situation as me'**.

One parent explained it as:

'When we do have our bad weeks and we come in and do the ice breaker we usually get it off our chest straightaway and you notice that person sits up a bit taller. If one person is a bit down, we let them come out of it – it's a very emotional time when we are in here – but we have a laugh – it's nice we are very sociable in here.'

Another person described how this extends beyond the time when they meet formally as a group:

'We talk on messenger – some of us already know each other. Most of us are on Facebook and we see each other's posts. So, if I'm in town, I'll post anyone around to meet up?'

One person noticed:

'There's a couple of us on the course who are quite chatty, but we've seen others come out of their shell – we encourage each other – we let each other cry, used to be who can have the first packet of tissues. Being around each other, we all start off shy and timid, and we grow together and as we progress, we get to know each other's backgrounds and stories.'

Another person talked about the added benefits of the course:

'It's nice to get away from your partners as well. There's no judgement you start the course as you are, but you are growing together – there are always ups and downs. There is the support from Extra itself. It's more than a course. It's like a whole package.'

In addition to the feelings around their growing confidence and developing a positive frame of mind some people had concrete examples of how attending the course had changed their lives. Related to **'I am a confident person'**.

one person said:

'I wanted to say that I've now got a job. This course gave me the confidence to go for a job. A healthcare assistant at Colchester hospital. I've dreamed of doing it since I started the course. At the interview I felt a bit nervous, but I thought I'm just going to do this, whatever the outcome is. I still can't believe it.'

This was echoed by someone else who said:

'I want to do another course, a nail beauty course, to do people's nails – I can have my own business.'

Parents and carers also made comments related to the other category of outcomes i.e. what they thought about their parenting skills and relationships with their children. One parent reflected on how changes to her behaviour has positively affected her ability to talk to her children,

'I communicate well with my children'.

'I think about things more - use things with the kids now as well. If they are winding you up rather than overreacting, I now think breathe, you calm down you feel different and you act different. I find that really, really helpful because it breaks it down, it makes it smaller and easier to handle and to cope with'.

One parent explained how she has managed to do things with her children which she has never been able to do before **'I enjoy spending time with my children'**

'I took my son to Pizza Hut last week on my own which I have never ever done before and I was fine I wasn't nervous. I've always wanted to be with another adult - it was a big change in me'

Others shared how feeling more confident meant they had more fun with their children:

'I've changed the way I am with the kids – if I go into town with them instead of it being boring with me just thinking I've got to do my bits around town – now I act a bit silly with the kids and we laugh – and I don't care what other people think – I'm just having a silly moment with me kids'

Participants attending courses more than once

The topic of attending the same courses more than once has occurred throughout this evaluation. Many participants see the value of being able to attend a second time. The comments below validate this duplication on a personal level.

One person commented:

'I've found it easier with these facilitators – a lot of people have said. Each time you do the course you get something out of it anyway. We laugh a lot which is great – laughter is the best form of medicine as some of us do suffer from mental health issues. You can pick up a phone get on a course you are prescribing your own medicine by doing it. Who needs the medicine when you can come on a course and support each other?'

Another said:

'I did this course last year but doing it this year has totally changed me as a person – so it was the right time for me to the course'.

The quotes above provide some explanation of why people attend the same course more than once. However, as an organisation Extra will need to maintain a broader view to ensure that the balance

between the benefits some individuals accrue does not interfere with access to the courses for other people on the waiting list.

Findings – Building Confidence long course

1. The data suggests that the greatest benefits at the end of the course were weighted towards personal benefits for parents and carers, improved confidence and self-esteem, rather than perceived changes to relationships with their children, which reflects the emphasis of the course.
2. The substantial improvements in confidence and wellbeing that participants accrued during the course were maintained in the following year. Furthermore, in most categories the positive benefits were not only maintained but continued to increase a year after the course, evidencing that the course had a long-term positive impact on participants.
3. Parent and carer baseline scores were higher with respect to their relationships with their children. There was a smaller but significant improvement in these scores at the end of the course and a year later this was maintained and increased slightly.
4. The outcomes align with Extra's programmes objectives that parents and carers will feel less isolated and have more social networks of support, will have improved mental health, will have increased confidence and will communicate better and have improved relationships with their children.
5. Extracts from interviews with course participants provide many concrete examples of how parents now feel good about themselves, have more confidence, feel they are coping better, and enjoy their children more.
6. To ensure equity in access to courses it is suggested that monitoring is set up to capture the number of people that attend the same course more than once and which courses this applies to. This will inform practice and policy around this issue.

SWAN course

SWAN courses – April 2018- July 2018 in Walton and Wivenhoe

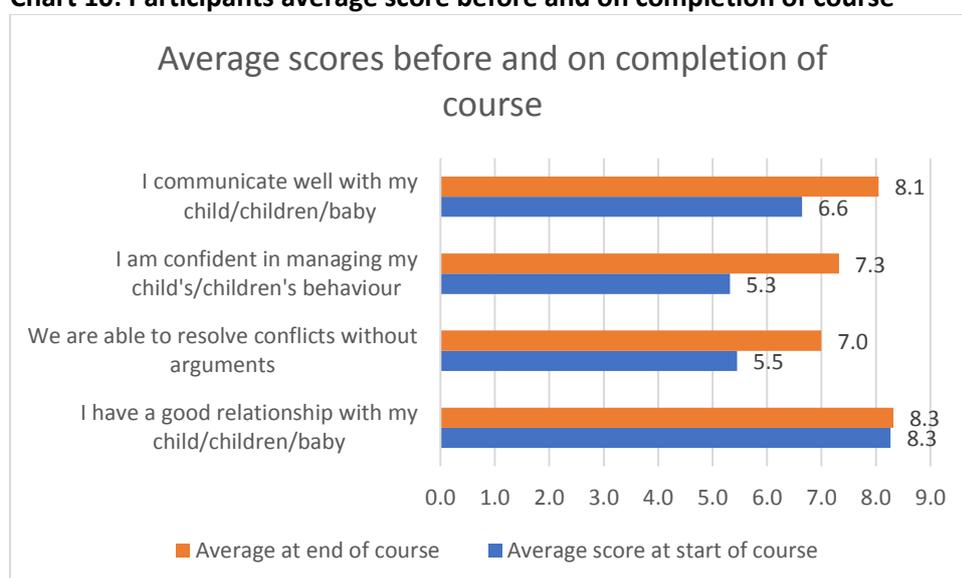
During this period there were two courses, in two locations, running at the same time, in Wivenhoe and Walton and the data from both groups is only available as combined scores. The period, April – July 2018, was selected so that interviews could be carried out with participants nearly a year later to assess whether any impact was long-term.

At the start of the course some 22 participants completed a self-assessment form. They scored themselves, out of ten, against a range of statements, to provide baseline data of how they perceive themselves. They also completed Strengths and Difficulty questionnaires (SDQ's – Goodman) regarding their children's behaviour and emotional difficulties.

At the end of the course participants scored themselves again against the same statements. This information is analysed in the following section to assess whether there was a positive or negative change as a result of attending the course.

Firstly, the chart below shows the category of statements about parents and carers managing their children's difficulties, behaviour and how they manage those relationships.

Chart 10: Participants average score before and on completion of course

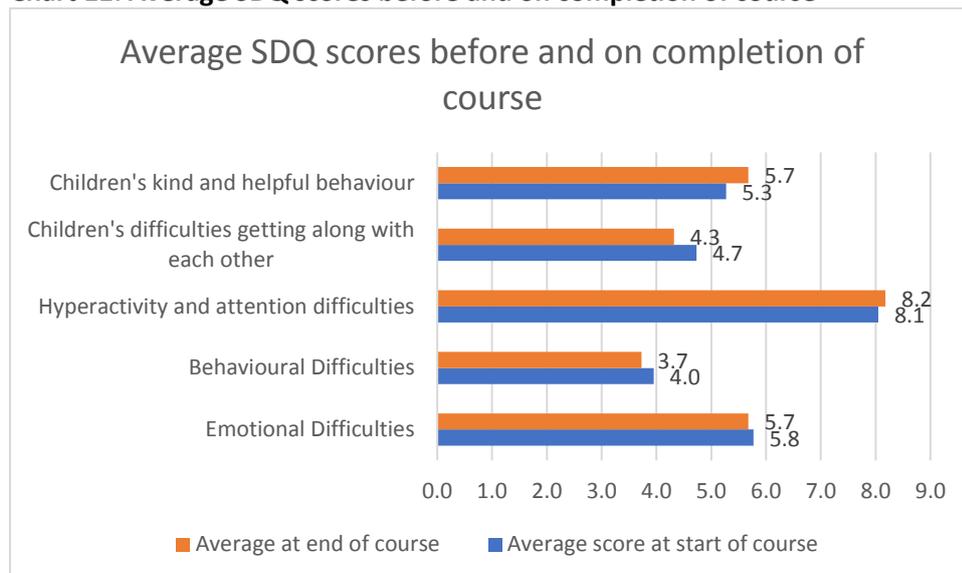


Looking in detail at data in the above chart we can see:

- ✓ At the beginning of the course the average score for 'I communicate well with my child/children/baby' was 6.6 and this increased to 8.1 at the end of the course.
- ✓ At the beginning of the course the average score for 'I am confident in managing my child/children's behaviour' was low at 5.3 and this increased to 7.3 at the end of the course.
- ✓ At the beginning of the course the average score for 'We are able to resolve conflicts without arguments' was low at 5.5 and this increased to 7 at the end of the course.

Then secondly the chart below records average SDQ scores before and on completion of the course.

Chart 11: Average SDQ scores before and on completion of course



Then looking at children’s behaviour we can see:

- ✓ At the beginning of the course the average score for ‘behavioural difficulties’ was 3.7 and this barely increased to 4 at the end of the course. This shows a negative increase from the borderline into the abnormal range.
- ✓ At the beginning of the course the average score for ‘emotional difficulties’ was 5.7 and this barely increased to 5.8 at the end of the course. This shows a negative increase within the abnormal range.

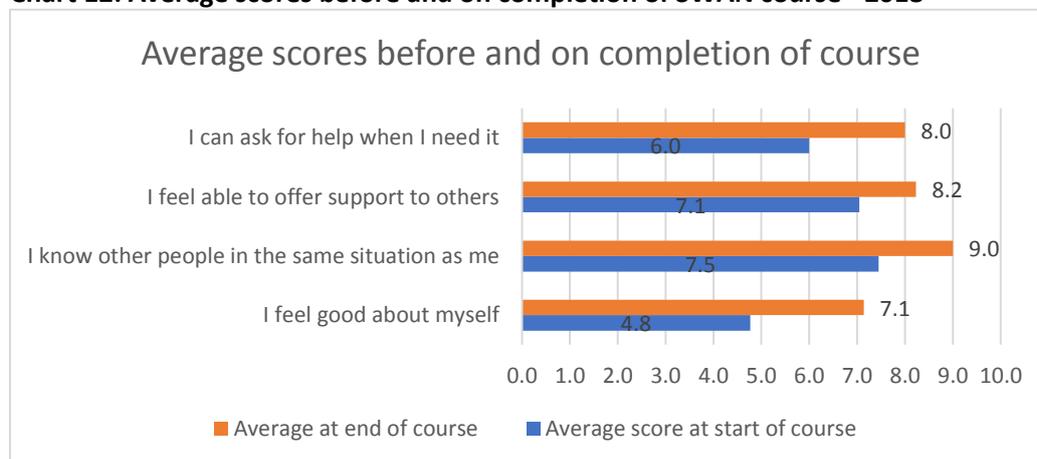
This shows that the biggest positive change in scoring relates to how participants feel about their ability to manage their children’s behaviour and emotions. This suggests that the course had the biggest impact on improving parent’s belief in their own abilities to manage their children’s behaviour.

There are no improvements in the scoring categories of children’s behaviour mentioned earlier. This is not surprising because on completion of the course parents and carers had only recently acquired new skills and been introduced to new strategies for dealing with difficult behaviour. Other explanations are that children with additional needs often do not respond well to change in the initial stages. So, it takes time, when parents introduce new routines or rules, for new behaviour to become embedded. Also, for some children with additional needs it is not possible to change their behaviour, but the course can nevertheless make a positive change to the approach and attitude of parents and carers to their children.

The chart below shows the positive increase in scoring in all the statements which relate to how people feel about themselves before the course and on completion.

Looking more closely at the statements about how people feel about themselves and whether they feel supported results show that before the course began participants gave themselves a very low score, less than five out of ten, 4.8, for ‘I feel good about myself’.

Chart 12: Average scores before and on completion of SWAN course - 2018



The chart above compares statements about how participants feel about themselves and whether they feel supported, both before and on completion of the course. The change in scoring is highlighted below:

- ✓ At the beginning of the course the average score for ‘I feel good about myself’ was 4.8 and this increased to 7.1 at the end of the course
- ✓ At the beginning of the course the average score for ‘I can ask for help when I need it’ was 6 and this increased to 8 at the end of the course
- ✓ At the beginning of the course the average score for ‘I feel able to offer support to others’ was 7.1 and this increased to 8.2 at the end of the course
- ✓ At the beginning of the course the average score for ‘I know other people in the same situation as me’ was 7.5 and this increased to 9 at the end of the course

Overall the chart above shows the positive increase in scoring in all the statements which relate to how people feel about themselves on completion of the course. It indicates that participants gained the most benefit in the area where they scored lowest before the course started ‘I feel good about myself’. The average scores show also that people were more able to offer support and ask for it when they need it.

The data above refers to participant’s perceptions before the course started and on completion. We do not have score charts for 2019, a year later, from the 2018 SWAN participants, so cannot make a direct comparison between 2019 and a year ago.

Instead a focus group of 2018 course participants was held in July 2019, at the SEN Drop-in support group in Walton Community Centre. The information gathered at the focus group has been used to assess whether the 2018 SWAN course outcomes have been maintained and fulfil Extra's four core programme objectives.

The focus group consisted of five former course participants who were asked a series of semi-structured questions to find out whether the benefits from attending the course in 2018 had a lasting impact. Specifically the aim was to investigate whether the positive scoring, at the end of the course, relating to: how they feel about themselves; their ability to ask for help when needed; able to support others; increased confidence in managing their children's behaviour; communicating well with their children; and knowing other people in the same situation had endured over the past year. Also, whether, after a year, there had been any changes to their children's emotional and behavioural difficulties as a result of using the techniques and strategies they learnt on the course. Parents, one couple and three women spoke freely and enthusiastically about their experiences attending the course. They commented on the constructive way that the course was delivered and how this enabled people to share their experiences and learn from each other as well as the facilitators.

Firstly, examining the category of statements about parents and carers managing their children's difficulties, behaviour and how they manage those relationships. Two different parents talked about how they are using techniques they learnt on the course to help them manage their children's **'emotional difficulties'**.

- *'We use charts to motivate behaviour having something visual works well with her. Using the red, yellow green faces for expressing feelings – it's on her bedside and she will come downstairs and can't talk, but will show the red, then she goes to yellow, then green and I know she is ready to talk'.*
- *'Yes, the chart is useful because our child doesn't show any emotion and won't ask are you alright daddy, even when I was rushed off to hospital. He only cares about the impact it has on him, e.g. will it stop me going to the shop to get a toy. We also use it to show him what we are feeling'.*

Another parent spoke about the techniques she learnt which she uses to help with daughter's **'behavioural difficulties'**.

- *'When I did the SWAN course I was at my lowest, after doing SWAN it really helped me and my daughter and I still do some of the techniques. We still use the boundary setting*

side quite a lot, and she still pushes it, we did always try to implement it, but waived a bit, but when we came here it firmed it up’.

- *‘I still have the folder from the course with all the bits of paper and sometimes I will go to it to remind myself of what we learnt and see if there is something in there that I can use at that point’*

Parents were asked whether they were able to manage their children’s behaviour by being **‘able to resolve conflict without argument’**. Most people responded saying that they take each day as it comes and there are good days and bad days but overall, they feel more in control. The course has also given them confidence to deal with other people and their reactions to their children’s behaviour.

One parent described the difficulties that can arise between partners and their children but how they deal with them now:

‘My partner and daughter clash a lot, and I have to say don’t shout stay calm so it’s like I have to train him too. It’s difficult as we aren’t on the same page. Sometimes he says you deal with it I can’t. It is better if one person deals with it as it doesn’t overload the child’.

Another parent observed

‘Some other family members have old fashioned views and they still hit children and they are not going to do that with mine. That’s what you are dealing with and that’s quite hard’.

Parents were then asked about what affect the course has had on them and the way they manage their children’s behaviour in the last year. One participant said that the course had made her more **‘confident in managing her child’s behaviour’**:

‘My daughter is bigger than me and she lashes out but now I talk to her, tell her to breathe and calm down..... If I get angry it just makes the situation worse, now I try to compose myself so that I’m not angry when I deal with her’

The next section asks questions about the second category of statements, about how people feel about themselves and whether they feel supported. It became apparent from discussions with course participants that the social networks that developed from the course were very important to them. Several people spoke about how being a parent of children with additional needs makes them

feel like outsiders, as if they are a failure as a parent. This is often reinforced when they are out, and strangers criticise them for their children's behaviour because the children are perceived as naughty and as the parent you are responsible.

All the parents agreed how important it is to **'know other people in the same situation as me'** and to **'feel able to offer support to others'**.

'The SWAN course was very relaxed, and it means that everyone takes part and contributes and learns by participating. Even though all your children are different, even though they may have the same diagnosis we all have something we can give each other. The atmosphere in the group means that we respect each other, listen, we never say well I disagree with you. Everybody has their own story and there is no judgement'.

One parent describes the impact the course had on her:

'I looked forward to going to the SWAN course, it wasn't something you dreaded. I couldn't wait to go to see what I could do next; the course came along at exactly the right time for me. I had done hundreds of courses and I still couldn't find a way at that point to move forward. I felt completely out of control but learning what I did really helped emotionally and with the practical stuff'.

Another parent described the way the course was delivered and the difference it made to her:

'You do hear of other courses going on – I did the Maze course and I got loads of bits of paper, but I still felt lost and lonely. Whereas in the SWAN course we all felt connected and part of a little community, whereas Maze is something you go to. The SWAN course was more informal, there was food on the table, which you sat around, you could get up and make a cup of tea. Whereas at the Maze you were all set up in chairs in a circle it was more like being at school, having a lesson. It's just nice that you feel comfortable and you can come in and say I've had a rubbish week and can cry, I think we have all had a little cry at one point'.

Facilitators identify the main reoccurring challenge for parents and carers, when they come onto a SWAN course, is a feeling of isolation.

'You live in a mainstream world and all the signals you are getting, from families, friends are that you are not doing something right – so you feel a failure – then you start to meet people that make your life the norm – no longer an outsider.'

Facilitators remarked that the most significant outcome from the course was hearing people say, '**now enjoy my children**'.

'It's like parenting is so hard with children with additional needs that you slip into a carer role and you are not enjoying the children at all – and almost become resentful of this life you didn't realise you would have – different to what you imagined having children would be – it's like a cloud and life is completely different you almost go through a grieving process. Then the parents here normalise it and learn to enjoy their children and celebrate the life that they've got....'

Facilitators also linked finding and becoming part of a support network/group as a reason why some **parents attend the course more than once**.

'All those things about not feeling alone. Also, things change every year, every month your child grows and change how they are behaving as one parent said "different strategies work at different times" Although this course parents were very engaged and they have taken away strategies to work with they won't have heard all the strategies, it's a lot to take in in eleven weeks. So, they pick up on some bits and then second time round they hear different bits. It is also a lot of reassurance for them that they are doing things to benefit their children.'

In summary discussions with participants, a year after they attended the SWAN course, confirmed that the course had a long-term positive effect on their lives which extended beyond the 11 weeks of the course.

Findings for SWAN long course

1. The average scores of course participants increased after attending the course reflecting improvements in confidence about managing their children's behaviour. Also knowing other people in the same situation, developing support networks and being able to offer and ask for help when needed, reduced social isolation.

2. Several parents commented on the importance of the SEN Drop-in support group and it became evident that the ongoing impact of the SWAN course could at least in part be attributed to the continuing support that was available through the group.
3. A participatory style of learning suits the subject matter as everyone has something or experience to bring along which enriches the group. The informal learning environment works well, sitting around a table, having food available and the facilities to get up to make a drink. This approach appeals to participants because it is different to a traditional learning environment which has negative associations for some parents.
4. It was clear that parents and carers continued to ask for help if they needed it. Indeed, this is most evident in their role in starting the SEN Drop-in group and their continued enthusiasm for attending. They recognised that the group support they could give each other, and other parents in the community, was invaluable. They also recognised the need for the continuing link with Extra, for additional support, information, and advice about other services and how to access them.
5. Parents demonstrated confidence in managing their children's behaviour whilst recognising the ongoing difficulties they face. There was evidence of techniques learnt on the course still being used and new ones being tried as children grow and new behaviours emerge. Confidence also extends to managing home and school relationships; improving the liaison required for children with additional needs.
6. It was identified that it is difficult for parents and carers who attend the SWAN course to communicate the principles and techniques to their partners/family/friends. This means that it can be problematic in getting agreement to implement new techniques and routines for children. There is scope to find a way to improve communication with the second parent or family members, so they are more aware of the principles and techniques – possibly a one-off session as part of the course.
7. The course provides scope for personal growth as well which can be difficult for parents of children with additional needs. Some participants go on to become volunteers taking on an informal role in the group, and for others this can lead onto training to become a facilitator of a group or courses.

6. Drop-in support groups

An integral part of the support Extra offers to parents and carers is the development and facilitation of drop-in support groups. Currently there are six of these informal parent and carer groups in Jaywick, Walton, Harwich and Clacton on Sea. The groups have grown organically out of courses that Extra has delivered, and the participants are active in jointly setting them up and running them. The drop-ins provide ongoing support and help to sustain the social networks and positive outcomes that were achieved on the courses. Each group is very different, and the format and activities are initiated by participants and supported by Extra. The drop-ins are open to all parents and carers in the community and new people arrive through ‘word of mouth’. Some parents that come to the drop-ins decide to attend Extra courses or workshops; they come along because they have met people at the drop-ins who have benefitted from courses, or because they are comfortable with the organisation, or because someone will come with them and they would not feel confident to go on their own.

So, the drop-ins fulfil two functions; they support and empower parents and carers, and they also help Extra broaden access to their services – reaching people that do not generally engage with support services.

Three drop-ins were visited in June and July 2019, and informal focus groups and individual interviews were held to find out what parents think about the groups and to assess how they fit with Extra’s overall aim and programme objectives.

The ‘Feel Good Friday’ drop-in support group meets in Jaywick and was started after the participants of the 2017 Improving Your Emotional Wellbeing (IYEW) course wanted to continue to meet. Up to eight people meet every Friday from 10-11.30am and Extra provides the room, refreshments and facilitator support when requested. There is no commitment to attend, no membership, and people drop-in when they want. It is a relatively small group which they explained suits them better

‘.....it is quieter and more personal, (it) seems like a little family’

When asked why they come along to the group the overwhelming response was a) for company and support from people that understand them and b) to build and maintain confidence.

a) Company and support

The support network that the group provides was a key reason for people to attend the drop-in.

As one person explained:

- *'...to have a good chat, provide each other with support, we all have had mental health problems, so it is good to get out from the four walls at home, so we don't feel so isolated – be with grown-ups, rather than be mummy or daddy.'*

The group looks forward to Fridays to see each other and they named the group 'Feel Good Friday' themselves:

- *'The company makes you feel better. If you've had a rubbish week coming on Friday can stop that spilling over into the weekend. Weekends aren't always an easy time, so it sets us up better.'*

Extra facilitates activities, if required, during term time then in the holidays the group just uses the room. They bring their children who play with each other, the children love it and ask to come.

Some of the term-time activities include visiting the Community allotment; the wildlife trust is making nearby waste ground into a wildlife garden and they went along to help make a bug hotel.

The group also went to the Pantomime in Clacton which was funded by the Lions, they would not have gone otherwise because of the cost.

Due to the trust that has built up sometimes they support each other to do something outside of the group that they wouldn't do on their own. Two group members are going to 'My Weight Matters' a 12-week weight management programme. Another two people went to a beading workshop in Clacton and one person gave the other one a lift, they would not have done it alone.

b) Maintaining and building confidence

Participants' confidence grows in different ways through the support of the group.

One person brings their maths course work in to do in the group. He said:

- *'I am sitting my GCSE maths, couldn't have done it two years ago – not confident enough. Next year I am going to do English.'*

One of the members is a parent volunteer and is there to support other parents and the activities going on. She said:

- *'(I) would never have done this before going on the Building Confidence course..... Domestic abuse in the past which battered me physically and mentally – I'm building myself up from a bad patch. I'll put volunteering on my CV as I'm job searching and Extra will provide a reference, I'm DBS checked. I haven't worked for six years.'*

Recognising the overlap between the informal drop-ins and the course the group members were asked whether they had been on any of the courses and if so, why did they attend? Responses again related to becoming more confident to be able to deal with issues in life.

Talking about a parenting course they attended one parent said:

- *‘Definitely attending the courses helps and has an impact on our children – confidence to stand up to older children and be the adult instead of giving in – because they want to push the boundaries back and back but now I have the confidence to stand my ground e.g. my child came home 11 minutes late, their phone is confiscated for the evening and sanctions not to play with friends on Saturday. You set the boundaries now.’*

Talking about having growing confidence another parent said:

- *‘Being able to speak up more for your kids. Part of the Building Confidence course is positive self-talk, changing negative into positive – skills used in daily life – building resilience. Before (with teachers) I would have said ‘all right then’ but now I keep going, it’s important that their needs are recognised, and they are not just seen as a naughty child.’*

One person said attending the SWAN course is helping her communicate with her children and is giving her the confidence to advocate for them:

- *‘I tell my children how I am feeling now as well as asking them about themselves, sharing more with them. I’m doing the SWAN course, so I am working out how to communicate better with my children – both of whom have autism. Also helps communication with school – SENCO problems at school because staff aren’t properly trained. It’s a battle, fighting for a diagnosis, it’s never ending.’*

The issue of attending several of the same courses came up in conversation, with parents saying that they had done several courses. They said this was because:

‘You get different things from the course, the content can be similar, but (there are) different parents, different experiences and how they have dealt with them – you can relate to people’s comments, particularly in break-out groups.’

Currently Extra has an ‘open door’ to return. The waiting list is respected, everyone on the waiting list is contacted to tell them that a course is running but parents must respond and tell Extra whether they want to do the course now or another time.

The ‘Heroes’ drop-in support group meet every Monday during term time, from 10-12, at Coppins Hall Community Centre, Clacton on Sea. This group has been running for four years and is a much larger group of parents, carers and their children, from 0 years to school age. There is a paid crèche worker and a facilitator from Extra.

It is a very busy group and a focus group was not possible, so parents and carers were interviewed separately and in two and threes. Parents spoke about the importance of the company and social support both they and their children get from coming along to the group.

As one parent explained:

*‘We receive a **combination of support, from other mums, facilitator Emma and Extra.** If we have any questions or need support, we would go to Emma but if it is little things, we ask other mums.’*

Below are the different ways parents and carers talked about how they felt personally supported through the group; they are categorised into a) social benefits, b) the importance of the facilitator, and c) support from Extra:

a) Social benefits for parent/carers

Some parents mentioned that the group helps them to get out and talk to people.

- *‘I’ve got four children and sometimes after you have done all the chores there doesn’t seem to be time to go out – but these are my Monday mornings, I come here have a cup of tea have a chat – even if I do that once a week I am keeping my sanity.’*
- *‘(I) started coming four months ago when I had my son I had really bad depression. I was getting myself really worked up sitting in-doors doing nothing and my Health Visitor told me about Sydney House and here.’*

The social benefits extend beyond the group and several parents meet up and do things together during the week.

- *‘Us two, meet outside of the group. There is a Facebook page and WhatsApp to arrange days out together, the group arranges it.’*
- *‘When she was 3 and half months, I went on the Incredible Years Baby course in Harwich, ‘E’ put me on that and through that I met another mum and we see each other every couple of weeks since then. Good friends, we socialise without the kids. And through her I have met other people.’*

b) The role of the facilitator

The facilitator fulfils an important role in creating trust within the group, keeping it solution focused, offering an additional level of expertise and information which parents' value.

- *'I've had a lot of help just talking to Emma. My eldest who is seven was diagnosed with ADHD a while ago, so I've talked to her a lot about that – she gives us different strategies.'*
- *'Easy to talk to Emma when I first came, I was really open and honest with her. She always asks if we are OK, safe, as she knows the situation'*
- *'Emma's lovely as soon as you walk in, she greets you'*
- *'(I am) comfortable to talk to Emma if we have a problem. I always talk to her about my week and the others do. She knows more about us than we do I think, she's helped when I'm in tears and everything. She's always here to offer support like last week my eldest girl is getting her hormones and she has ADHD and I've never really explained things to her – so I needed a responsible way of explaining things, so Emma printed out a booklet for her and said give her that and talk to her about it. She's really good if she doesn't know the answer she finds out and then gives it to you.'*

c) Support from Extra

Parents are aware and appreciate Extra as an organisation and some of them have a good understanding of what they do.

- *'Extra do always ask us what do you want – in the group or about other courses. The work they do is amazing. I know through my friend in Harwich that they do a group there as well. They do so much, and they get support from local people – at Christmas they found the money for Father Christmas. It's nice that everybody is included, and the trips they do, not everyone could afford to go to places if it wasn't for Extra. The fact that they find the funding for that, so that everyone can go, is amazing.'*
- *'About eight months ago I heard about it (Heroes) by word of mouth. I was really anxious about leaving the house. Now I've also done the CARE course. Really helpful and there was a woman there that worked at the Women's Refuge and I got in touch with them – I was a bit in limbo – Extra provided the link. I hadn't heard about it before I came along to the course.'*

The following section looks at the different ways parents and carers talked about the **benefits of coming to this group for their children**. Parents like the way the group caters for different age groups, that babies up to school age children are welcome. They also like that there is someone there, Sally the crèche worker, to help structure and encourage play between children and between parent and child. Parent and carer comments are loosely categorised into a) social development b) learning to play.

a) Social development

Several people commented that they liked the wide age-range of the children:

- *'The different ages are nice, it's nice to see her around smaller babies – she has seen me hold babies and hasn't got upset, so I think it would be alright to have another one. This group is the one thing that has been consistent in her life so far.'*

Another parent talked about the way her child has developed:

- *'I've been coming for a year. When I first started coming here, she would sit on my lap and wouldn't leave me – so now she ignores me and she goes off - she's much more confident..... She really came out of her shell – she wouldn't go to anyone before.'*
- *'The children get a lot out of coming here as well, he has come on in leaps and bounds. He only started talking about 5 months ago and he is getting really confident. He looks forward to this group every week – he loves it. He's making friends. At the beginning it was different.....'*

Other parents talked about the value of having a dedicated crèche worker:

- *'Sally's really lovely with my little boy who isn't very confident really and he sits on her lap and she reads to him. He always asks where's Sally. She's quite stern, a bit old school but he is really comfortable with her – he likes the structure he knows what's coming.'*
- *'If it (the Drop-in) wasn't here we would miss it absolutely. This is the only group we have been to where they are all lovely people, other groups can be a little bit unwelcoming. Also, in other places the kids run around and hit each other and then you get into arguments with the other mums. Emma says that Sally is here, but you have to watch your own children – some other places are a bit wild.'*

b) Learning to play with other children

There was one dad present in the group. He comes along when he has a day off as he likes to see where and what his child does in the group, and he doesn't like to disrupt his child's routine. He said:

- *'I am often the only man, but the group is welcoming, and it doesn't put me off coming. I think it's really important for my child to mix and play with other children.'*

Another parent commented on developing friendships through play saying:

- *'She's formed some lovely little friendships here and although when she goes home, she doesn't speak about them but you can see when she is here, she plays with them and you can see the connection there. I think it is so important at a young age to reinforce friendships and this group does that because they grow together.'*

From talking to parents, it soon becomes obvious that they value the group. However, the success of the group means that the group is so well attended that this has an impact on what activities can be offered. Those people that attend regularly said that in the last few weeks the group had been so full, overflowing and the noise echoes around the hall. They said the facilitator used to organise lots of arts and crafts and baking activities, easy recipes that parents could do at home with their children but now there are too many children to do this.

Several parents commented on how much the group had grown and that they no longer do the same range of activities, even coming up with their own solutions:

- *'We do a massive variety of stuff here – not so much in the last few weeks. But we do baking, themed stuff, firework painting, crafts, cards, making bird feeders – my daughter said mummy we need to feed the birds, helps to educate them about things'*
- *'I used to enjoy those activities – making cards for Father's Day – I'd like more of that. We'd be happy to donate a pound a session so that we could do more things like that – but if we are donating and other people aren't then we'd feel that we would be paying for the people that are making it overcrowded. So, it would be good to do it in a fair way. I would definitely pay to come here and do activities.'*

This was discussed with the facilitator who is aware of the pressure on the group because more people are attending. Currently she is thinking of ways to overcome this situation.

The facilitator also arranges for external organisations and agencies to attend the group. One parent commented on a recent visit by the Baby Bank:

'It's a swap shop for babies. So, she came here last week, and she had swimming costumes, baby's hats. We could choose what we needed, and if you have anything you can pass it on. It saves money, you don't have to pay anything, and you don't have to give anything. If you've got friends with children, the same age you can't pass things around – but this way you can.'

The Walton SEN' drop-in support group meets monthly, on the last Friday of the month during term time, from 9.15-11.15am. The group is for parents and carers of children with additional needs. The SEN support group was set up as a direct result of participants attending the SWAN course. After the course finished parents did not want to lose the support network that had been formed so they asked Extra to help set up a support group. Walton Community Centre supports this group by providing premises and Extra provides a facilitator and refreshments for the group.

A focus group with parents and carers took place in July 2019 with ten parents and carers. Out of the ten, some five had completed the SWAN course and the other five had come to the support group by 'word of mouth' recommendation looking for information and support. So, comments below come from people who have attended the SWAN course, those that attend the drop-in and those that have participated in both.

As one participant said:

'I went on the SWAN course and so did others and we just needed to keep it going – there was a break between the course and the group starting and it was a hole – we really felt that. Often to speak to professionals you have to wait 3-6 months and you don't always get the advice you need at the time you need it. Whereas if people have gone through it too, they have the knowledge and you can ask questions.'

Firstly, all parents were asked as to why they come along to the SEN Drop-In?

Parents come for different reasons, some people come for **support and information**:

- *'(I) come for support, like-minded people who know where you are coming from – I use other people's tips and advice, information. It's an outlet something you would miss if it wasn't here'.*
- *'It keeps going it doesn't just end' the course keeps going through the group and doesn't just stop and without that some of us might be back to square one'.*

A new person, who had just moved to Walton was struggling to get the right medication for her child with autism, spoke about the benefits of the group for her:

- *'So, I was in the house on my own didn't know anyone, so I thought I'd come along and thought if I don't like it, I'll leave but I loved it and stayed. I didn't know*

what services were available and it's all laid out in front of you and everyone's friendly – otherwise I would have been a hermit in my home and never leave'.

Other people come for the support of peers who share similar experiences which helps them feel **less isolated and improves their mental wellbeing:**

- *'It would make a big difference if it wasn't here. It's also a reason to get up and out of the house, to go somewhere and share some of the dealings you've got at home. My friends have gone back to work so I can't phone them and offload'.*
- *'(It's) nice to come and see other people in the same situation who have the same understanding – other people think the children are just playing up. You are not alone'.*
- *'But you just feel lonely anyway, to be honest. But now you have this network of people around you who know exactly how you feel and what you are going through. You know you will have someone now'.*
- *'This group means that we have someone to turn to without being judged. Birthday parties are difficult because other parents don't understand, and I have to explain that my child wouldn't cope so invite someone else'.*
- *'(It's) difficult because some parents think they understand – they think that just because two children have the same diagnosis, they are the same whereas they can have completely different traits. My son is a sensory seeker whereas another boy with a similar diagnosis is a sensory avoider – they are unique to themselves e.g. one doesn't want to be touched and the other wants bear hugs'.*

Parents were asked how important it is for them to come to the drop-in support group.

Several parents commented that the drop-in support group was very important to them, again because of the way it supports them:

- *'There was a little break between the end of the course and the start of the group, and we thought this can't stop we need this to continue. We always look forward to coming to this group we have belonged to others in the past, but I never looked forward to going to them'.*
- *'The group acts as informal sessions..... It's great to know that Extra is there – you have a group to fall back on. I can always ring up the facilitator (K), if I need information or advice'.*

- *‘Just knowing that Extra is there, and you can go to them if there is something you are not sure of or you want to get advice their door is always open. It’s never I don’t know who you can talk to its I’ll find out for you’*

The support group also provides opportunities for personal development. Often it is difficult for parents and carers, of children with additional needs, to return to employment because of the ongoing demands within the family. Also, lack of confidence can play a part in restricting employment aspirations.

One volunteer present said she would like to go on and train to be a group facilitator:

- *‘At first, I thought I could never do that, but it has come up in conversation a few times and now I think maybe I could do that, maybe I’d like to do that.’*

Findings

1. The drop-ins fulfil two functions; they support and empower parents and carers, and they also help Extra broaden access to their services – reaching people that do not generally engage with support services.
2. Each drop-in group is different and reflects the needs of the parents and carers that attend it because they have participated fully in setting it up
3. There is a flourishing relationship between the drop-in groups and the Extra courses. Drop-ins support parents and carers who have attended their courses and they attract new people looking for information and support. New group members then often then go on to attend courses which meet their needs. This makes the drop-ins very effective as they provide ongoing support after courses which helps to maintain positive outcomes.
4. All parents and carers talk about the benefits of having a social network of people around them that understand their situation and that this helps to reduce the feeling of social isolation.
5. Having facilitators in the drop-in groups means that Extra have ‘a finger on the pulse’ which allows them to develop new courses for emerging needs. They are also in a strong position to consult with service users about new issues and service ideas.
6. The drop-in group provides peer support, information and advice. There is a great deal of trust within the group and it is welcoming of new members, not at all cliquey. The group

extends and builds on the value of the course, as drop-in course attendees reinforce learning on the course. It also increases demand for the SWAN course as other group members hear about it from people who have done it, 'word of mouth recommendation'.

7. Even for parents/carers who haven't attended Extra courses the drop-in helps to prevent social isolation. It is a safe space where parent/carers can be honest about their experiences and feelings and feel supported by the group. Peer support works well because of the role of the facilitator who steers the group and is the constant presence and source of information in the group.

7. Parenting Platform

In addition to the work Extra carries out with parents and carers in Tendring they also organise and facilitate a regular termly meeting, called the Parenting Platform, with Statutory and Voluntary sector organisations. They host the meeting at Jaywick Community Resource Centre. It has been running for the past 13 years and serves several different purposes, both operational and strategic. Their role in supporting the Parenting Platform positions the organisation in the wider ‘professional’ community that provide complementary services in the locality.

One of the main pieces of work Extra performs for the Parenting Platform is to gather and publicise information from different organisations to see what is currently on offer for parents and carers in the district. This is done through ‘data capture sheets’ which organisations fill in termly and Extra uploads onto their website. This provides contact details of each organisation and an up-to-date programme of services and activities organisations offer to support parents, carers, young people and children with additional needs.

Attending the July 2019 meeting were representatives from a range of organisations including: Home-Start Colchester; Coastal Community Centre; Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service; Schools family liaison, Autism Anglia, Family Solutions, NACRO and employment opportunities for ex-offenders, Inclusion Ventures and Extra Support for Families.

Agencies were asked why they attend the Parenting Platform and their answers fell into three broad categories:

- 1) Comments relating to **Knowledge**:
 - *‘to gain knowledge and to keep up-to-date with what is going on as things change so rapidly’*
 - *‘to understand what is on offer from different organisations for families and carers’;*
 - *‘what the emerging problems are’*
 - *‘it enables you to profile your own service’*
 - *‘it is informative about the funding landscape’*
- 2) Comments relating to **Relationships and Partnerships**:
 - *‘you are much more likely to pick up the phone to discuss something if you have met the person and established a relationship’*
 - *‘you get to know other people working with families and these links can lead to working together on joint projects’*
 - *‘discussions are thought provoking and prevent a silo approach to delivering services’*
 - *‘you can discuss new ideas and get informed opinions from colleagues’*
- 3) Comments relating to **Identifying gaps in provision**:
 - *‘we identify gaps in provision and support’*
 - *‘we brainstorm solutions and suggestions for meeting these needs - the Building Confidence course delivered by Extra came out of this group, as several agencies recognised the low level of confidence felt by many parents they met’*
 - *‘we feedback on Pilot projects’*

Appendix 2 provides examples, from the July 2019 meeting, which illustrate how these three broad categories of activity occur.

At the end of the meeting representatives were asked to comment specifically about Extra and the work they do with parents and carers. The feedback from all organisations was positive and some sample responses are provided below.

- *‘We can refer families for courses and support through drop-ins, this is invaluable’. ‘The referral process is quite simple; some referrals are pages long and off putting’*
- *‘Agencies have confidence in Extra as they provide a high-quality service. For example, they keep in touch with parents and build relationships with them. When people are on their courses, they send reminders to parents to attend – text the day before’*
- *‘They provide a bespoke service and they are flexible and provide new courses as demand occurs’*
- *‘The Parenting Platform prevents duplication and helps us to understand how our services fit together and prevents fragmentation’*
- *‘Extra have been around for a long time and this provides stability particularly where organisations/projects come and go due to short term funding’*
- *‘It is always a worthwhile meeting (Parenting Platform) otherwise we wouldn’t come as we are all very busy, so it has to be worth taking time out of the business of providing over stretched services.’*

Findings

1. Through the Parenting Platform (PP) Extra takes a lead role in facilitating a forum for organisations providing services for parents and families in Tendring District, to share information, develop services, identify gaps in provision, strengthen relationships and create partnerships.
2. Extra benefits from hosting the PP as it positions them well to understand the ‘community of services’ available in the locality. This gives them a solid knowledge base from which to develop their own offer to parents/carers in a continuously changing landscape of need and provision.
3. There is scope for building the costs of hosting the PP and the work around the data capture sheets into future funding bids. As this could be presented as a key element of project research, planning and development which directly contributes towards achieving the core objectives.

Appendix 1: Full range of courses/workshops offered by Extra

EXTRA provides positive parenting programmes and workshops for parents/carers for all age groups from pre-birth, to babies, toddlers, pre-school, primary, secondary aged. EXTRA also provides courses to help parents/carers who have children with additional needs up to the age of 25.

EXTRA also offers targeted courses to help with emotional health, building confidence, domestic abuse and more. The courses on offer are listed below. The programme each term depends upon demand from parents/carers and the numbers on Extra's waiting lists.

Positive parenting programmes

The Baby's Coming – pre-birth	Early Years Step by Step
Incredible Years Baby Programme	School Readiness course
Incredible Years Toddler Programme	Primary Step by Step
STOP	Support with Additional Needs (SWAN)

Targeted courses

Building Confidence	Learning to Relax
Improving Your Emotional Wellbeing	Developing Resilience
Managing Anxiety	Mindfulness
Managing Stress	Managing Anger
Coping with Loss	Conflict/Abuse Resolutions Explored (CARE)
FLASH (Families Learning About Self-harm)	Youth/Adult Mental Health First Aid

Workshops (2/3 hours one off sessions)

ADHD	Transition to Secondary School
Resilience	Coping with Defiant Behaviour
Skills for school	'Stranger Danger'
Internet Safety	First Aid
Weaning	Play
Praise	Routines

Appendix 2: Parenting Platform – Examples of organisations/partners working together to share information, and make connections to meet the needs of parents and carers

This information was captured from the July 2019 Parenting Platform meeting. It has been included as an illustration of how meeting ‘face to face’ allows partners to share information, make connections, add value to each other’s projects, and to identify emerging needs and gaps in provision.

The main business of this Summer Term meeting was to share information and provide a detailed explanation of the activity programme each organisation was running for the coming Summer holidays. As one person said

‘reading a leaflet is fine but talking through the courses at the meeting means that you have them in the back of your mind, and you can tell people what is on offer– it gives you an insight’.

Within their young person’s summer holiday programme Clacton Coastal Community Centre were including breakfast and lunch with many activities due to ‘hungry holiday’. Many parents who receive free school meals struggle to feed their children in the long holidays so activities which provide food are a significant attraction. Most of their activities are free to be inclusive and meet the needs of low-income households.

Sharing this information stimulated further connections as Home-Start Colchester explained the Healthy Living cookery activities they provide, where parents cook and eat healthy food and then take the recipe home. Home-Start have put together a booklet of these recipes and agreed to share them with Extra who identified that they are one of the few groups that have access to a kitchen in their premises and therefore maybe able to offer cooking activities.

Extra discussed a new course they will be delivering in the Autumn called the Strong Family Project. It is aimed at working with parents of Year 5- and 6 children; as this younger age group are being targeted by gangs and are at increasing risk of getting involved in them. This course proposal developed out of a safeguarding meeting and was by invitation of a local school concerned with this topic.

Home-Start Colchester mentioned that they have been running a coaching course for children at risk to identify their likes, aims and to help them plan how to achieve steps towards these goals. The funding for this project has finished but they still offer it for one or two people through other funds.

Extra also provided feedback on a recent ADHD workshop they delivered. Some 24 parents attended demonstrating a big need for information and support. Parents and carers response to the event was that 2 hours wasn't enough time – it was enough time for information but not for strategies for dealing with behaviour which they need.

Autism Anglia identified that there is a gap in provision for children/young people with high functioning autism and profiling their service advised that they would be launching a new diagnosis service and are also operating a benefits advice line.

NACRO who provide services for ex-military that come through criminal justice system. They explained that a greater emphasis is being placed on working with and encouraging businesses and local employers to offer employment - working at a strategic level to improve/up-date HR recruitment policies.

In terms of gaps in provision it was raised that there is more need for 'train the trainer' opportunities to cascade skills and information and this would also help meet the need for peer advocacy. It was acknowledged that training is key as information gets out of date quickly and there is a danger of misinformation. Extra do offer 'train the trainer' opportunities but more as an organic process rather than through a specific course. Some of their group participants go on to volunteer at peer support groups, then they shadow a facilitator delivering a course. They are then given facilitation skills training and will work with an experienced facilitator to deliver a course.